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ABSTRACT

Presented is a review of literature on the provision of special education services to handicapped children in rural areas. The inadequacy of such provisions is seen to be due to problems in transportation, unavailability of special equipment and teaching materials, and administrative problems. Cooperative programing is reported as the key innovative aspect of most federal programs. Discussed is the need for research in utilizing innovations in financing, staffing, modern technology, and transportation. Among conclusions listed is that consolidation of regular school districts is a major problem. Appended is a list of Title III projects. (SB)

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# SPECIAL EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS:

# AN UNSOLVED PROBLEM

Stanley Urban

June, 1972

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## PREFACE

The author wishes to acknowlege that this paper represents scholarship and not research. Nothing new has been discovered, instead a survey has been made of the existing material on the subject.

However, such a discussion is germane since since special education in rural areas is receiving increased attention and recognition as a persistant problem area.

## I. Introduction

Providing special education services in sparsely populated areas is a complex and multi-faceted problem. In spite of the fact that its importance has been recognized at the highest levels of policy making authority within special education, little research attention has been devoted to this area.

Jordan[1] gives the problem proper perspective when she says:

> "Exploration of special education services in sparsely populated areas offers a tremendous challenge to the research field. Despite reported escalation in kind and number of educational research projects within the last few years, despite all we hear about creativity, imagination, and bold thought, new and better approaches to old problems and new answers to new questions, little recognition and practically no attention have been given to this research problem. There is practically no research and almost no guidelines relevant to the provision of special education programs for youth in geographic areas characterized by great space and few people."

Her statement is as valid today as it was in 1966. The only revision necessary is that a higher priority has been allotted to special education for children in rural areas.

Priority for these children was recommended by the National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children in their First Annual Report[2] to the United States Office of Education on

[1] Jordan, June (Editor), Special Education Services in Sparsely Populated Areas: Guidelines for Research. Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, Boulder, Colorado, P. 1.

[2] _____, Notes and Working Papers Concerning the Administration of Programs Authorized Under Title VI of Public Law 89-10, ESEA Act, As Amended— Education of Handicapped Children. Prepared for the Subcommittee on Education U.S. Senate, May 1968, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1969.

January 31, 1968. Specifically, the committee recommended that:

> "Provisions should be made for Federal financial assistance for the development of models or prototype demonstrations of services to rural handicapped children."[3]

The report went on to discuss plans which the committee felt should be demonstrated on a substantial scale or prototype basis. Suggested approaches were as follows:

> "Development of special educational administration units for sparsely settled areas...
> Development of special boarding facilities on a short term basis...
> Development of transportation systems that will reach handicapped children in remote areas...
> Development of procedures using modern communication techniques for homebound children..."[4]

At least progress has been made in setting priorities and recognizing the importance of educating handicapped children in rural areas.

Perhaps it is a good idea before proceeding further, to note that the terms "rural" and "sparsely settled" will be used interchangeably in this paper. In general usage, however, "sparsely settled" does connote an area even less populated than a rural area. If such a distinction is important in this paper, ample clarification will be made.

[3] Ibid., P.5.

[4] Ibid., P.40.

II. Statement of the Problem

Adequate provisions for handicapped children in rural areas have not been developed because of problems in transportation, unavailability of special equipment and teaching materials, and administrative problems in sparsely populated areas. As professional special educators these problems should concern us for three reasons.

(1) Of 26,983[5] school districts in the U.S. only 6,711[6] of them operated one or more special classes.

(2) Mackie[7] in a recent comprehensive study estimated that we are serving 50% of the speech and hearing, and visually handicapped, 8% of the emotionall disturbed, and 33% of the retarded.

(3) The President's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty[8] stated that more than 2.3 million rural youth, ages 14-24 dropped out of school and 8.7% of them (about 199,000) completed less than five years of school. Moreover 700,000 adults in rural areas have never enrolled in school.

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[5] Mackie, Romaine P., Special Education in the United States 1948-66, Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, N.Y., P. 40. (1969)

[6] Ibid., P. 40.

[7] Ibid., P. 7.

[8] _____, The People Left Behind, A Report by the Advisory Committee on Rural Poverty, The President's National Advisory Committee on Rural Poverty, 1960, P. 40.

It is fair to assume that the low number of handicapped children being serviced is a result of the fact that less than 1/4 of the school districts in the United States offer special education. Furthermore, we can assume that the majority of the districts that do not offer special education are in rural areas. Unfortunately, this speculated relationship must remain an assumption since I could not locate any statistical information regarding the nature of those districts that do not provide special education.

However, it is fair to assume that these districts not providing service are in rural areas. This assumption is based on Chalfant's study Factors Related to Special Education Services. The purpose of the study was to

> "determine which factors contribute to presence or absence of special education services and to develop a diagnostic technique to indicate whether or not counties could be expected to provide special education services." [9]

His results indicated:

> "Counties with a high proportion of population engaged in rural occupations and living in a rural form of residence present severe administrative problems in identifying and bringing together sufficient numbers of children to justify special education services....

[9] Chalfant, James C., Factors Related to Special Education Services, CEC Research Monograph Series B, No. B-3, Council for Exceptional Children, NEA, 1201 Sixteenth St., NW, Washington, D.C., 1967, P. 8.

> it becomes apparent that factors such as urbanization, education, socioeconomic status, rural occupations, financial ability and population growth have implications for special education services..." [10]

Chalfant's conclusion was that rural school districts are least likely to provide special education.

The third fact listed as causing serious concern to the special educator is the problem of 2.3 million rural dropouts. This is an area where many conclusions and inferences could be drawn. However, for the purposes of this paper it is sufficient to state that at least 10% or 230,000 of these children were handicapped and in need of special education. Thus, if special education intervention could have been afforded these children, they may not have been dropouts.

III. Suggested Solutions to the Problem

The most productive source of suggested solutions to providing special education in rural areas has been Title III and Title VI of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Most of the projects funded deal with demonstrating the value of Co-operative Programming as a technique for

[10] Ibid., P. 52-54.

facilitating the delivery of services to rural handicapped children. Also, a small percentage of the projects involve the use of advanced communications technology.

A review of the projects funded under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act during fiscal 1968 and 1969 reveals that at least twenty projects deal specifically with the handicapped in rural areas. These projects are listed in Appendix A.

Seventeen of these projects seek to implement the concept of co-operative services in rural areas as a means of serving handicapped children. The types of co-operative arrangements include(1) a joint agreement plan between two or more local districts, (2) encouraging small districts to sattelize around large districts, and (3) true co-operative units in which small school districts delegate responsility for special education to a new unit of administrative authority. The few remaining projects deal with technology or itinerant diagnostic personnel.

A typical project funded under Title III whose key innovative aspect is co-operative programming can be seen in the following proposal of a currently operational program:

> "Title, Co-operative Programs in Special Education, Las Vegas, New Mexico, Project #DPSC-67-4394. A special education program will be established in a bi-cultural economically disadvantaged rural area.. Co-operative agreements will be established between

> school districts and all state institutions for disabled children. Consultants will be brought into the area to develop the following areas of emphasis.. (1) identification and evaluation...(2) development of the program through the encouragement of co-operative classes...the project will benefit 229 children grades k-12."[11]

Thus the main thrust of this project is co-operative services. Basically the project provides for agreements between school districts with no provision for the creation of a separate co-operative district.

A perusal of Title VI projects reveals a similar theme of utilizing co-operative services as a technique to serve handicapped children. We visited a Title VI project of this nature in Indiana. Idaho,[12] Michigan[13] Colorado,[14] and Iowa[15] are using Title VI funds to encourage similar co-operative efforts. In some of these states where co-operative districts are already in existence funds are used to encourage co-operative programming for previously unserved populations.

Colorado is a good example of this latter approach. The Southeast Metropolitan Board of Co-operative Services (SEMBOCS) composed of five rural districts will conduct a

[11] _____, Pacesetters in Innovation Fiscal Year 1967. U.S. Dept. of HEW, OE, Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education, April 1968, No. OE 20103-67, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1968, Pp. 83-84.

[12] Williams, Jo Ann (Editor), State Leadership, National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Spring Issue, June 1964, Dept. of Education, Frankfort, Ky., P. 35.

[13] _____, Resume' Title VI Projects Funded Fiscal 69. Michigan State Dept. of Education, Div. of Special Education, 1969, Pp. 1-7.

[14] Williams, ibid., Pp. 15-16.

[15] Ibid., Pp. 42-44.

three year stimulation project to serve multiply involved children who never before attended school. The Board was awarded the grant and will conduct the project.[16]

Again, the main innovative aspect of this project is the provision of co-operative services.

What are the chances for the success and continuation of these Title III and Title VI projects? The projects will no doubt succeed since we already know that co-operative programming is an effective means to serve rural handicapped children. However, it is reasonable to doubt that these programs will continue after the expiration of the original grant.

Chalfant[17] provides the basis for these doubts.

> "The fact that low expectancy districts have not exercised their discretion in using the joint agreement plan under permissive law has severe implications for the effectiveness of this kind of solution for the low expectancy county. Apparently, presenting non-urban low expectancy counties with the legal means of transporting children to co-operative classes supplemented by a state support reimbursement program is not sufficient to expect wide scale implementation of legislative provisions.
>
> Legal provisions such as the joint agreement plan provide the means for organizing co-operative programs. They do not necessarily take into account, however, factors that are related to the community organization of special programs.

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[16] Williams, ibid., P. 16.

[17] Chalfant, ibid., P. 54.

The results suggest that it is not sufficient to provide legislation permitting school districts to establish school programs under permissive law."

If Chalfant's research is correct then the best we can hope for is an increased awareness in the communities conducting these projects that co-operative services are a necessary prerequisite for serving exceptional children in rural areas.

In the area of utilizing technology to serve handicapped children pitifully little has been done under Title III or Title VI. The most creative and promising project deals with regular children. However, since it has implications for handicapped children in rural areas it will be discussed here.

The project involves the Grannison Watershed School District[18] which is located in a sparsely settled area approximately 200 miles from Denver. It measures about 3200 square miles and has a population of 1,513 school children. About 1/4 of the children spend two hours per day on a school bus or the equivalent of seven school days per month.

This school district decided to attack the problem of how to utilize these wasted hours on the bus. Their solution was an "audiobus", a regular bus adopted to transport

[18]Hoffman, Milton, "New Way of Busing Students", American Education, February 1968, Pp. 16-17.

56 pupils and accommodate electronic equipment. The electronic gear is composed of a seven-channel audiotape deck and 56 headsets, each with its own volume and channel selector controls.

Listening guides are distributed weekly. Programs for groups and individual instruction are available on the seven channels. An audiotape library has been developed for use in connection with the "audiobus". These tapes deal with everything from foreign languages and plays to recreational programs.

This solution to the transportation problem of regular children has implications for handicapped children who must travel long distances to services.

Unfortunately, a thorough examination of the projects listed in the Research in Education [19] indexes for the last three years reveal few projects concerned with the education of handicapped children in rural areas. Of those projects that did concern themselves with this problem, all considered the technique of co-operative programming as their primary innovation.

[19] Research in Education, U.S. Dept. of HEW, OE, Bureau of Research, published monthly November 1966- October 1969, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C..

In general a thorough review of all the sources relating to special education in rural areas revealed few programs utilizing new uses of transportation, innovative applications of modern communications, technology or research data on administrative strategies.

It is also interesting to note that much of the literature dealing with special education in rural areas is repetitive. For example, in the 1968 edition of Exceptional Children Research Review, Chapter 9 on "Administration" by Chalfant and Henderson deals with special education in rural areas by restating conclusions from Special Education Services in Sparsely Populated Areas: Guidelines for Research. Also, Isenberg in the latter document essentially repeats his conclusions as stated in Chapter 2, Cooperative Programs in Special Education.

IV. Needed Research

With the emphasis on co-operative programs there has not been variety in the suggested solutions to the problem of serving handicapped children in rural areas. What is needed is a wider range of research projects utilizing innovations in financing, staffing, modern technology and transportation.

In the area of financing special education in rural areas basic questions have remained unanswered. For example, should state reimbursement formulas be corrected to include a factor for sparsity of population? Perhaps, even pre-requisite to this research would be a statewide census of handicapped children to determine which districts would be eligible for such increased aid. Wisconsin[20] is currently using its Title VI funds to conduct a statewide census of handicapped children.which could provide an objective basis for a statement concerning the financial needs of rural areas.

Staffing special education programs in rural areas is another research problem that has received too little attention. The increasing specialization of special education teachers has severe implications for rural areas.

For example a single school district in Montana [21] has 3,300 square miles in area and only 11 handicapped children. This district certainly can not employ a teacher of the deaf, the blind, the retarded, the emotionally disturbed, the neurologically impaired and the physically handicapped. Even if the various experts were available at the State Department of Eudcation, the district is 300 to 400 miles away

[20]Williams, ibid., P. 63.

[21]Jordan, ibid., P.2.

from the state capitol. Thus, teacher education and teacher certification is a key issue in providing new personnel who have a multi-disciplinary background. However, I did not locate a single project which addressed itself to this means of solving the rural special education problem.

An encouraging development in the area of teacher education is the interim report [22] of the committee studying certification requirements for special education teachers in Michigan. The committee is recommending that all special education teachers have 16 hours in a common core of competencies which all teachers of the handicapped must have and which cut across currently accepted disability lines and 12 hours including practice teaching in a specific disability area.

Other aspects of the personnel problem that have not been researched thoroughly are attracting and retaining qualified personnel in rural areas. Perhaps, scholarships could be offered for professional preparation in special education in exchange for 2 or 3 years service in rural areas. Also, there is a need for research data concerning

[22] _____, Report of the Committee to Study the Certification of Teachers of the Handicapped, Mimeo-Draft Not for Distribution, November 24, Dr. Morvin Wirtz, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Pp. 1-6.

the characteristics of the teachers who choose to work and live in rural areas.

The area that is most discouraging in that its potential has hardly been touched is the utilization of advanced communication technology to serve handicapped children in rural areas.

Carr[23] in 1961 described the use of the telephone in teaching homebound children. She cautioned, "Teleteaching should never be used if pupils can attend a class...not recommended for the retarded... not recommended for children under the third grade...." Research has not answered if these limitations are true and should be imposed on teleteaching. For example, the utilization of television with teleteaching might show Carr's conclusion to be incorrect.

Cable TV makes such a combination of television and telephone communication possible.[24] Cable TV currently services 1.2 million families in the United States and in five years they will serve one half the households in the United States or thirty million families. Recent government decisions have allowed CATV companies to originate

[23] Carr, Dorothy B., "Teleteaching- A New Approach to Teaching Elementary and Secondary Homebound Pupils", Exceptional Children, November 1964, P. 125.

[24] _____, "Cable TV Leaps into the Big Time", Business Week, November22, 1969, P. 100.

their own programs. These decisions coupled with the fact that all sets made recently have 12 VHF channels and 70 UHF channels in addition to the 12 regular channels lead to the possibiltiy of individual home instruction over the television.

Connor[25] warned against over reliance on home instruction when he said:

> "....differences due to confinement may be educationally debilitating since it can preclude his early exploration and sensory experimentation on which future conceptualization and academic learning will be based"

Research needs to be done to determine if a combined audio-visual approach would pose less danger in terms of Connor's warning. Furthermore, the possibility of supplementing tele-teaching with an itinerant specialist, not unlike a peripatologist for blind children certainly has potential in terms of insuring adequate concept and sensory development among children receiving tele-teaching. Both of these suggestions are worthy of further evaluation by administrators in sparsely settled areas.

Finally, an aspect of regular education that has implications for special education in rural areas is the consolidation of regular school districts. This becomes especially

[25]Connor, Leo E., Administration of Special Education, Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 1961, P. 18.

significant when we consi[illegible] that South Dakota has 2,388 school districts, 1,258 one-teacher schools and a total student population of only 189,000 pupils.[26] It is interesting to compare these figures with Rhode Island which has 213,000 pupils and only 40 school districts and no one-teacher schools.[27] Other sparsely settled states that also have huge numbers of school districts are Nebraska 2,546;[28] Montana 906,[29] Oklahoma 1,049,[30] and Kansas 1,500.[31]

Research should explore the relationship between regular school re-organization and possible effects on special education. In South Dakota for example, the average school district has less than 100 pupils. The implication here is that regular school districts must be consolidated before we can hope to consider the provision of special education. Other states which are as sparsely settled as South Dakota have combined K-12 into a single school building with four hundred pupils.[32] Perhaps, a consolidation such as this is necessary before we can even begin to consider providing special education.

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[26]Barr, Richard H., and Foster, Betty J., Preliminary Statistics of State School Systems 1965-66, No. OE-200006-66, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., Pp. 7-8.

[27]Ibid., Pp. 7-8.

[28]Ibid., P. 7.

[29,30,31]Ibid., P. 7.

[32]_____, "Skyline Gathers K-12 Under One Roof", American School Board Journal, July 1968, P. 22.

## V. Summary and Conclusion

Services to handicapped children in rural and sparsely settled areas is a complex problem that has received little research attention despite acknowledgement of its importance. This is unfortunate since 2/3 of the handicapped children in the United States do not receive special education and research indicates that rural districts are least likely to provide special education.

The key innovative aspect of most federal programs concerned with the problem is co-operative programming. Very few projects funded under Title III or Title VI of ESEA utilize modern communications technology, new patterns of staffing, creative or creative uses of transportation. Neither are any of the projects directed at basic research questions in the area. These potential avenues have remained largely unexplored. Furthermore, there is a paucity of literature in the area and much of what exists is repetitive.

There are solutions on the horizon and continued emphasis on this problem should bring encouraging developments.

Finally, we get to the "so what" of this paper. The following conclusions can be inferred:

(1) It is unfortunate that federal funds appropriated for innovation and creativity in serving handicapped children must be used to prove the merits of co-operative planning to

those among whom its benefits should be obvious.

(2) Consolidation of regular school districts is a major problem. Progress in this area effects the rate of progress in expanding co-operative programming for handicapped children.

(3) In light of Chalfant's research monograph it can be reasonably asked if rural areas will ever provide special education without some form of mandatory legislation.

(4) Sparsely settled areas like Montana, Idaho, New Mexico, etc. can reasonably ask themselves if their respective state departments of education should provide services for all handicapped children on a state level.

Finally, a continued emphasis on the area of special education for handicapped children in rural areas is both necessary and desirable because of the problem's importance and the paucity of information in the area.

## APPENDIX A

The following Title III projects are taken from Pace setters in Innovation Fiscal Year 1967:

| Project Number and Title | Purpose |
|---|---|
| #ES 001 210 Region V Psychological Services Center | Mobile diagnostic unit to serve five rural counties and and then special classes will be organized. |
| #ES 001 296 Guidance and Special Services Center - Cumberland-Linclon Sch Depts | Two specially equipped classrooms located in a center will serve handicapped children from the districts. |
| #ES 001 525 Che-Mad-Her-On Inc., Regional Supplementary Education Center | Development of Special Education programs for the region will be given high priority. |
| #ES 001 563 SE Region Special Education Service Center-- A Muti-district Project | Special Education center will be established to serve thirteen school districts. |
| #ES 001 327 Mobile Service Unit | To bring specialized services to multi-district rural area. Emphasis on in-service training in the 28 districts served. |
| #ES 001 175 Countywide Proposal for Special Services for Children With Emotional Problems. | County unit will serve emotionally disturbed in all shool districts. |
| #ES 001 167 Tri-County Supplementary Service Center | Twenty-one school districts will be served by the center for their Special Education needs. |
| #ES 001 514 Education Co-operative (West Met.), (Wellesley Hills, Mass.) | Co-operative service center to provide Special Education etc. to thirteen districts. |
| #ES 001 515 Project Lighthouse--South Shore School System Center. | Special Education progrrams will be surveyed for weakness and co-operative planning encouraged. |

| | |
|---|---|
| #ES 001 580 Idaho Educational Development Centers and Services for Exceptional Chuldren | To provide special education services in a rural two county area. |
| #ES 001 583 Co-operatve Program in Special Education | Co-operative services between school districts. |

The following Title III projects are taken from Pacesetters in Innovation Fiscal Year1968:

| | |
|---|---|
| #ES 002 009 Seuoyah County Diagnostic and Clinical Remedial Services Center. | A mobile unit will bring special services to a rural area and establish special classes. Children K-12 will be served. |
| #ES 002 Blackstone Valley Cerebral Dysfunction Center. (#ES002 249) | A special program will be established to serve co-operating communities . |
| #ES 002 465 Regional Special Educational Services Center | Emphasis will be place on developing a regional approach to serving rural handicapped children. |
| #ES002 525 Area Program for Educational Improvement of Exceptional Children | Special education programs will be developed for a rural area. Five portable classrooms will house the programs. |
| #ES 002 537 Planning and Pilot and Kindergarten Project | Co-operative programs will be set up to serve rural disadvantaged children. |
| ES 002 536 SE Tennessee Regional Improvement of Diagnostic and Educational Services. | A special education center will be established to serve a ten county area. |
| #ES 002 107 Central Kansas Diagnostic and Remedial Education Center. | A four county rural area will be served and experimental classrooms will be established at the center to serve handicapped children. |

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